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ABSTRACT

This Digest discusses the ongoing effort to develop new methods for identifying talent and giftedness among bilingual and limited-English-proficient Hispanic students. To provide better profiles for the identification of all gifted children, research suggests use of both qualitative and quantitative instruments. Several instruments are recommended for assessing disadvantaged children, including culturally and linguistically diverse students, and for use with Spanish-speaking students. Most school districts serving gifted and talented bilingual Hispanic students use multiple criteria in the screening and identification process. Multiple criteria may include ethnographic or dynamic assessment, portfolios, test scores, teacher observation, behavioral checklists, writing samples, and input from parents and community members. Certain student traits may alert teachers to consider further assessment. Although Hispanic females have shown a consistent trend of doing better academically than males, they remain seriously underrepresented in higher education. To increase participation of Hispanic female students in programs for the gifted and talented, both parents and educators must be advocates. As more culturally and linguistically diverse students enter the nation's schools, local programs must be in place to identify and educate the gifted and talented among them and must allow their participation while they are learning English. (Contains 21 references.) (SV)

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Traditionally, gifted and talented programs have been filled with White, middle- or upper-middle-class students. These are students whose home backgrounds have provided them enrichment opportunities and linguistic experiences to enhance their natural abilities in ways that allow them to do outstandingly well on standardized tests. Increasingly, observers point out that the tests are designed by White, middle- or upper-middle-class experts whose academic backgrounds and experiences have led them to set criteria tending to favor students from the same backgrounds (Barkan & Bernal, 1991; Jimenez, 1997). This Digest describes the ongoing effort to develop new methods for identifying and assessing bilingual and limited-English-proficient (LEP) Hispanic students.

Many LEP Hispanic students have backgrounds that are culturally and linguistically different from the traditional developers and takers of gifted and talented tests. Nevertheless, many of these students are capable, have the requisite skills, and should be eligible for gifted and talented programs. Indeed, across the country LEP Hispanic students participate in these programs in areas with sizable Hispanic populations, primarily in large urban school districts such as Los Angeles, San Diego, Miami, and New York. New programs geared to identify and educate these students have begun to develop in other places (e.g., Provo, Utah; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Hall County, Georgia) experiencing increased bilingual Hispanic student enrollment.

Professional journals of bilingual as well as gifted and talented educators have recently featured articles addressing the needs of these students (Barkan & Bernal, 1991; Bermúdez & Rakow, 1993; Castellano, 1997; Kitano & Espinosa, 1995; Maker, 1996). A summit held in Washington, DC, in January 1997—convened by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA)—brought together leading experts to articulate, for the first time on a national level, issues addressing LEP students with outstanding talents. Besides these national efforts, there appears to be a grassroots movement developing across the United States, initiated by parents and other advocates, to include LEP Hispanic students in programs serving the gifted and talented (Castellano, 1997).

## Identification and Assessment of Gifted and Talented Bilingual Hispanic Students

In an effort to provide better profiles for the identification of all gifted children, current research suggests use of both qualitative measures and quantitative instruments, such as achievement and intelligence tests (Garcia, 1994). Early in the 1980s, a national panel of experts recommended use of several instruments when assessing children from disadvantaged populations, including culturally and linguistically diverse students (Richert, Alvino, & McDonnel, 1982). Some of the instruments they recommended have remained in use, including *Progressive Matrices, Standard* (Raven, 1960); *SOI Screening Form for Gifted* (Meeker & Meeker, 1975); *System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment* (Mercer & Lewis, 1978); *Culture Fair Intelligence Test, Scale 1* (Cattell & Cattell, 1950). Spanish language instruments this author has found useful for measuring academic achievement include *Aprenda: La Prueba de Logros en Espanol, Intermediate 2* (Psychological Corporation, 1990); *Bateria Woodcock Psico-Educativa en Espanol* (Woodcock, 1982); *Spanish Assessment of Basic Education, Second Edition, Level 2* (Hampton- Brown Company, 1991); and *La Prueba Riverside de Realizacion en Espanol* (Cote, 1984). For more information about these instruments and others, readers can refer to the on-line searchable *ERIC/AE Test Locator* at <http://ericae.net/testcol.htm> on the Internet. Other new instruments are being developed, including one specifically designed to identify gifted bilingual Hispanic students.[1]

## The Use of Multiple Criteria

Most school districts serving gifted and talented bilingual Hispanic students use multiple criteria (Castellano, 1994; Garcia, 1994; Bernal & Reyna, 1974) in the screening and identification processes. Multiple criteria may include, among other items, (a) ethnographic assessment procedures (the student is observed in multiple contexts over time), (b) dynamic assessment (the student is given the opportunity to transfer newly acquired skills to novel situations), (c) portfolio assessment, (d) the use of test scores (performance based and/or nonverbal) in the native or English language (depending on the child's level of fluency), (e) teacher observation, (f) behavioral checklists, (g) past school performance, (h) parent interview, (i) writing samples and other samples of creativity and/or achievement, and (j) input from the cultural group with which the student identifies in the local school community.

Furthermore, Bernal and Reyna (1974) identified several characteristics as typical among gifted Hispanic American children:

- They rapidly acquire English language skills once exposed to the language and given an opportunity to use it expressively.
- They exhibit leadership ability, although often in an open or unobtrusive manner, with strong interpersonal skills.
- They tend to have older playmates and easily engage adults in lively conversation.

[1] For more information on this screening instrument, contact Dr. Beverly J. Irby at Sam Houston State University or Rafael Lara-Alecio at Texas A&M University.

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- They enjoy intelligent and (or effective) risk-taking behavior, often accompanied by a sense of drama.
- They can keep busy and entertained, especially by imaginative games and ingenious applications, such as getting the most out of a few simple toys and objects.
- They accept responsibilities at home normally reserved for older children, such as the supervision of younger siblings or helping others to do their homework.
- They are "street wise" and are recognized by others as youngsters who have the ability to "make it" in the Anglo-dominated society.

Observant educators who notice these traits in particular students may consider referring them for further assessment.

## Gender Issues

Some researchers indicate that opportunities for gifted females have increased, while barriers to their achievement have decreased (Reis & Callahan, 1989). If this is in fact the case, we should see an increasing number of Hispanic girls referred and accepted into gifted and talented programs. While research specifically targeting Hispanic females is scarce, a study of 63 doctoral graduates and candidates conducted by Thorne (1995) found that these high-achieving young women varied on several measures of achievement motivation, but all exhibited low levels of sex-role traditionalism and low-to-average levels of fear of success. Ortiz (1995), in a summary of research on the educational achievement of Hispanic women, found that in comparisons with Hispanic males, females showed slight increases in educational achievement and a consistent trend of doing better than males. She also found that Hispanic women have experienced improvements in participation at all higher education levels. Yet, they remain seriously underrepresented, with only 1% of Mexican American women enrolling in graduate programs.

To increase participation of Hispanic female students in programs for the gifted and talented, both parents and educators must be advocates. Hispanic parents need to nominate their daughters for admittance, and school-based educators need to acquire better skills in identifying gifted and talented females, including students with limited English skills.

Cultural and linguistic minority students have historically been denied access to programs in gifted education. Girls have faced additional barriers to postsecondary and graduate school participation. Thus, special efforts may be warranted in identifying and placing gifted Hispanic females into programs that will recognize and honor their unique talents.

## Summary and Conclusion

The process for admission into a program for the gifted and talented is complex at best. Theories, approaches, guidelines, and plans vary across the country, but as more culturally and linguistically diverse students enter the nation's schools, it is imperative to have local programs in place to identify and educate the gifted and talented among them. They should enter these programs while studying to become proficient in English. Otherwise, Hispanic student achievement will continue to lag behind other ethnic groups, as educators fail to recognize the talents of so many students. Recognition of our shortcomings in this regard could serve as the impetus to double our efforts to provide all academically gifted children a chance to excel.

Thanks to grant programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, such as Title VII (bilingual) and Javitz (gifted), school districts across the country have received the necessary funding to develop gifted education program models to identify and serve gifted LEP Hispanic and other bilingual groups.

It is often said that youth are the most important natural resource of a great nation. Gifted programs can help prepare youth of all cultures and languages to become productive citizens and critical thinkers, ensuring that the future of the country is in good hands.

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